

Draft Recommendations for Tourism

Tourism is important to the economy of every Maine region. It directly generates more than seven per cent of Maine's gross state product and over ten percent of our employment. But to really understand the importance, interdependence, and complexity of Maine's tourism industry is to realize that it is not a single entity but an amalgamation of thousands of diverse business interests deriving some or all of their revenues from leisure travelers. Tourism supports all or a part of businesses such as resorts, B&Bs, sporting camps, restaurants, art galleries, professional guides, golf courses, gas stations, variety stores, transportation companies, insurance companies, gift shops, cruise and excursion boat lines, car dealers, building supply stores, furniture manufacturers, boat builders, accounting firms, lawyers and building contractors. In addition, the tourism infrastructure provides the amenities that attract not only tourists, but also new residents and businesses to the state.

Tourism could not exist in its present form in Maine without the critical base of natural resources that provide the foundation of the visitor experience. Tourism can and should play an important part in preserving, protecting and sustaining our natural resources and their related industries. Agriculture, Aquaculture, Fishing and Forestry not only provide important economic opportunities and jobs in their own right, but also play a very important part in protecting and providing the appealing environment that travelers, both residents and non-residents, are seeking; such as active fishing villages, coastal vistas, productive open farm land and orchards, mountains, lakes, rivers and vast tracts of contiguous forest and wildlife habitat. Therefore, the maintenance of a close and supporting working relationship between tourism and the other natural resource based industries is both symbiotic and imperative.

Given its role as a major contributor to the Maine economy, as well as its relationship with Maine communities and other natural resource based industries throughout the state, the tourism industry could, if properly managed, strengthen its role as an economic force far beyond its current position, and prove the premise that economic prosperity and natural resource sustainability are mutually achievable.

Draft Recommendations for Tourism

To preserve the health and long-term sustainability of the tourism industry and increase its benefits throughout the state, the Department of Economic and Community Development, Office of Tourism, and the Maine Tourism Commission's Natural Resources Committee provide the following four recommendations:

Engage the State's University and Community College System:

A major concern of policy makers is the flight of young Maine college graduates to other states in search of jobs. Recent studies have indicated that part of the problem is that our educational system has not developed curricula and programs aimed at preparing students for the changing job environment. This gap is clearly evidenced by the lack of programs aimed at the hospitality and tourism industry, which is arguably the largest sector employer in Maine.

We therefore recommend the establishment within the University System and the Community College System in consultation with the Maine Office of Tourism and industry stakeholders, a bachelors and masters degree program in Hospitality and Tourism. In addition, a high-level center of ongoing basic and applied tourism research with a related extension program should be established within the university system. The research and extension program will provide market and product information and technical assistance to Maine's tourism industry. The degree, research, and extension programs will also seek to enhance economic linkages between the tourism industry and fisheries, aquaculture, agriculture, and forestry, as well as with the creative economy.

Outcomes could include:

- A supply of career oriented graduates to fill the many openings in the hospitality and related industries, leading to management jobs.
- Identification of recommended tourism development strategies for rural areas.
- Guidelines for sustainable business venture "best practices."
- Development of carrying capacity measurements and management tactics that reflect private public partnerships and emphasis on local control.
- Market research.

Draft Recommendations for Tourism

- Comprehensive tourism job and labor statistics on which policy decisions may be devised – in cooperation with the Department of Labor.
- Exploration of opportunities for turning “leakages” into “linkages” by increasing the volume and integration of Maine’s service, manufactured and harvested products used by the hospitality and recreation industry.
- Promote and provide support for the establishment of private sector sponsored and administered ecotourism accreditation / certification programs - as exemplified by the certification program used by Maine Association of Sea Kayak Guides and Instructors.
- In areas where conflicts exist, public and private sector interests will utilize the research to provide guidance in the development of appropriate solutions.

2. Clarify State Agency Roles and Responsibilities:

The Governor’s policy on inter-agency cooperation and integration of crosscutting issues and activities must be clearly conveyed to Commissioners and managers as well as articulated throughout each department.

Recommended actions:

- In order to fully implement the tourism recommendations in this document and fulfill the economic development possibilities, a lead entity must be assigned responsibility. The Office of Tourism is well positioned to serve in this role. To accomplish this the Office of Tourism will need both a broader mandate and increased resources in terms of staff and operating funds. MOT will need greater capacity in the areas of coordination, planning, research, design, technical and financial assistance, in addition to its traditional role of marketing Maine as a travel destination. The early stages of this effort should include greater coordination and new structural relationships between MOT, relevant state agencies, the University and Community College Systems, NGOs and the private sector.

Draft Recommendations for Tourism

- Ensure cross-industry coordination by formalizing the work of the Blaine House Conference on Natural Resource-based Industries Planning Committee into a standing advisory committee to the Governor. In addition to formalizing the committee's role, broaden its membership to include appropriate private sector representation from each of the major industry groups.
- Charge LMF, BPL, IFW, LURC, DOC, MOT with collaborating with landowners, tourism regions, recreation user groups, and conservation organizations in framing a strategy for acquisition, management, and promotion of the public's and the land trusts' expanding Northern Forest and Down east Lakes domain. This is critical both for tourism branding and long-term resource conservation.
- Review and update the "Explore Maine" Transportation Plan, with an identification of resources and a timetable for implementation. Updating the plan should include broad input from private sector interests.
- Increase the State Planning Office's capacity to provide technical assistance to municipalities seeking tourism industry growth, in the form of tools to assess industry economic, social and environmental benefits and costs, to determine carrying capacity limits, and to encourage industry growth accordingly. The emphasis of the technical assistance provided should respect the interests of the local municipality.
- Establish meaningful development incentives to encourage private sector tourism industry investment in targeted areas either by expanding the eligibility of existing economic development programs or by creating new ones. There are numerous incentive opportunities and opportunity zones for other industry development interests; similar offerings should be made available to tourism businesses if expansion into the underdeveloped areas of the state is to be realized.

3. Sustainable Tourism Economic Development:

Blueprints outlining the sustainable tourism economic development opportunities within local areas and which feed into regional plans must be prepared and maintained over time. Communities, LURC and the regional tourism organizations should receive technical assistance from academic, government and private sector organizations in the development of such blueprints. The blueprints should define the potential synergies and collaborative opportunities between tourism and other natural resource based industries present in the area, including proposed solutions for perceived conflicts.

The Blueprint model should be a balanced integration of three areas:

- Assessment: A comprehensive assessment of the existing and potential resources available, both natural and built.
- Community Capacity: A determination of local and regional community capacity and commitment as it relates to maintaining and/or increasing a sustainable tourism industry
- Business Development: Translation of the resource assessment and community capacity into tourism business opportunities and enhancements, along with systems of support for realizing the opportunities and enhancements to be communicated to business interests and communities for action.

Outcomes to consider: The following outcomes represent examples of possible market opportunities for Maine's tourism industry in the form of new and/or expanded visitation.

- Increased bird watching infrastructure – Birding is one of the country's fastest growing wildlife watching segments. The development of viewing stands, interpretive materials and signage are important development considerations if Maine is to take advantage of this market segment.

Draft Recommendations for Tourism

- Parameters such as size, location and amenity package required to provide suitable accommodation and dining facilities in areas that have natural tourism resources sufficient to attract visitors, but lack nearby quality accommodations.
- Affirmation or establishment of Farmland Protection and Working Waterfront Policies – The support of policies that promote viable, sustainable and environmentally responsible working farmlands and waterfronts are important factors in maintaining a healthy rural landscape, a draw for travelers.
- Create moose viewing areas - Help fill the need for people who want to see moose that are not willing or physically able to seek moose watching opportunities. These could be developed cooperatively with local and or regional private public partnerships.
- Increase sport fishing capacity - Use the results of improvements at IF&W's fish hatcheries around the state to offer increased stocking rates in regions that have capacity for more tourism – i.e. the Androscoggin River in the Bethel region including selected ponds and or selected stretches of the Kennebec River. - Develop and implement procedures for improvements in the quantity and quality of native non-stocked sport species through natural reproduction. – Support improvements that enhance salt water sport fishing.
- Increase MDOT's support and development of community pedestrian and bike trails – More and more people, residents and visitors alike are seeking out destinations that offer such recreational resources. The success of the Brunswick river trail offers insight into the benefits of such a resource.
- Increased development and placement of historical and interpretive signage – The growing interest on the part of the traveling public not only to visit but also to learn about destinations demands that much more information be made available than presently exists. Destinations such as Maine have a rich and varied story to tell and such signage programs can go a long way to tell it.

Comprehensive (“single image”) Branding Campaign:

“Maine”, in itself, is a brand. Perhaps the single most important image that the brand “Maine” elicits among those who recognize it is that of Quality. This aspect has been capitalized on by such diverse businesses as Tom’s of Maine, LL Bean, Poland Spring Waters and the Maine Office of Tourism.

However well known a brand may be in a local market, its awareness levels may drop to near zero as distance from its sphere of influence increases. A strong image of Maine does not exist in 100% of the population in even its adjacent states and the Maritimes. Maine’s image is fuzzy at best, if it has any recognition at all, in more distant parts of the United States and overseas.

Achieving brand recognition on a national basis, let alone in overseas markets, is exceedingly expensive. Disney, as well known as it is for example, plans to spend \$ 250 million in one year on a new advertising campaign for improvements made in its theme parks in Orlando and Anaheim!

Given the costs of developing and promoting a brand in a reasonable number of geographically dispersed markets, it only makes sense that government branding efforts be consolidated and that a “single brand image” be developed and utilized to promote Maine’s products and services in all out of state “export” markets.

The Office of Tourism in DECD has the national and international contacts and experience to serve as the lead agency to coordinate and oversee the development and implementation of an overall branding effort for use by all state agencies as well as affiliated stakeholders.

By consolidating individual state agency marketing resources, both financial and human, adherence to a common brand theme can be controlled and synergies developed between campaigns for tourism, business attraction, state parks and campgrounds, hunting and fishing license sales and promotion of Maine products of all types.